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SUBJECT: DAILY SUMMARY OF JAPANESE PRESS 03/26/08

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(1) Interim report on Aegis destroyer's collision accident brings chain of blunders to light

ASAHI (Page 2) (Excerpts)
March 22, 2008

Crewmen aboard the Aegis-equipped destroyer spotted the lights of fishing boats more than 30 minutes before the collision, and yet the vessel was left on autopilot. An interim report on the Maritime Self-Defense Force's (MSDF) Aegis destroyer Atago's collision with the trawler Seitoku Maru, released on March 21 by the Ministry of

Defense (MOD), reveals such details of the accident. According to the report, more than one crewman recognized that several trawlers were approaching the ship, and yet the atmosphere among them did not grow tense. Even the action to avoid the collision was not taken until just before it happened. Though the contents of the report are somewhat fragmentary with consideration given to a possible impact on the ongoing investigation, it has further clarified the possibility that the Aegis destroyer was unable to avoid the accident due to crewmen's optimistic perception toward the situation and a number of errors in judgment.

Group of fishing boats spotted more than 30 minutes before collision: Many opportunities that could have prevented collision

There were many opportunities for the Atago to move to accommodate the group of fishing boats, including the Seitoku Maru. A crewman on duty spotted white lights above the horizon 30 degrees to the right around 3:30 a.m., 37 minutes before the collision. He reported it to a duty officer.

Another crewman on watch also identified three or four red lights 9-11 kilometers away to the right side. White lights are mast lights and red lights are portside lights. If red lights are seen on the right side, the two ships would inevitably be crossing paths, provided that they continued their planned routes. However, this crewman on duty did not report any information about it to a duty officer, judging that there would be no danger.

Another opportunity that could have prevented the accident came nine minutes before the collision. A crewman on duty after the replacement noticed three red lights by observation about five kilometers away at an angle of 30-40 degrees to the right. Shoji Masuda, manager of the Planning and International Affairs Department

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of the Japan Sea Marine Accident Prevention Association and former senior Japan Coast Guard (JCG) officer, pointed out the problem: "When the Atago crewmen spotted red lights five kilometers away from the ship, they should have continued monitoring the ships without interruption with the possibility of a collision in mind. It was also necessary for the duty officer to give orders, including letting the watchman confirm (the location of the ships) using a radar. But the report does not indicate that any such action was taken."

This watchman also confirmed another white light and reported on information about it to the duty officer. He was asked to confirm the report by the Combat Information Center (CIC) about 3 minutes before the collision. He then once again reported on the information to the duty officer. This crewman saw a left-moving white light in the 30 degrees direction to the right. The report notes that while this watchman was confirming the white lights, he looked away from the target that was moving toward the left.

Masuda sees that the last chance that could have prevented the collision came about a minute before the accident, when the watchman noticed two ships moving 500 meters away from the ship in the 20 degrees direction to the right. The Atago was then presumably running at a speed of approximately 320 meters per minute. and the fishing boat at a speed of about 460 meters per minute. Masuda wondered whether the collision could have been avoided, even if the Atago had immediately taken action to avoid the ship.

At that time, the tension finally mounted on the bridge. The duty officer said, "This fishing boat is coming close to us." One watchman headed toward the lookout on the starboard side of the bridge. The fishing boat that appeared to be the Seitoku Maru approached up to 100-70 meters to the right. The duty officer conducted an emergency stop and ordered crewmen to reverse the ship. However, it was too late.

The interim report also highlights problems of the lookout arrangement of the Atago. Lookouts are located at both sides of the bridge. However, since it was raining that day, crewmen on duty were inside the bridge. Former Rear Admiral Watanabe, who once served as captain of a destroyer, noted, "Basically, crewmen on duty perform

their duty outside, wearing rain gear, even if it is rainy. They should have conducted their duty outside the bridge, since they were navigating home waters, where there are many ships running."

The Atago is equipped with three radars to identity ships running nearby -- one on the bridge and two in the CIC. Seven lookouts were supposed to be on duty, but only 3-4 crewmen were actually on duty before the replacement without permission. As a result, there were times when there were no radar controllers attending either of the two radars in the CIC.

There were seven crewmen on duty after the replacement. The interim report notes that the investigations conducted thus far have obtained no information confirming that crewmen realized that the Seitoku Maru registered on the radar screens."

Sloppy replacement procedures: No indication of crewmen realizing danger

Third Regional Coast Guard Headquarters (3rd RCGH) is carrying out an investigation into the accident. One focus of the investigation

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is how the "danger" was reported at the time of the replacement. There were 24 crewmen on duty at the time of the collision -- 11 on the bridge, seven in the CIC and six in the wheel house.

A crewmen who went up the bridge at 3:56 a.m. testified that he received a report during the replacement noting that a crewmen who was on duty before him saw several red lights (on the portside of the boat) in the 20-50 degrees direction to the right, but judged there would be no danger, because the boat was moving behind the ship.

This personnel also testified that since the boat was spotted by observation, he assumed that the duty officer was also aware of the boat and therefore did not report on information about it to the duty officer. His testimony confirms that he did not feel any danger.

Given the results of hearings from about 70 crewmen, excluding duty officers, their testimonies had no indications that they felt a danger of a possible collision, even though they realized red and white lights of the fishing boat by observation.

Report was made 16 minutes after accident: "Could have been shortened"

Were the search and rescue work and the notification system appropriate? It is said that MSDF educates warship crewmen to give top priority to rescue work. The interim report reveals how the Atago captain and crewmen responded to the accident.

The Atago reported the accident to the JCG at 4:23 or 16 minutes after the accident. A crewmen who reported the accident to the JCG entered the bridge five minutes after he got up and notified 3rd RCGH of the accident, after confirming the time of the collision and the location of the boat. The interim report notes that if this lookout had immediately reported just on the fact of the collision, the time taken for the relaying of information could have been shortened.

The captain left the bridge around 6:00 p.m. on the 18th and entered his office after dinner. He took a nap from around 0:30 a.m. He was still taking a nap at the time of the collision. He reportedly said, "I woke up around 4:00 a.m. and learned the accident though an announcement in the vessel."

MOD Minister Ishiba received a report on the accident about 90 minutes after the accident. This has led to a revision to the information transmission system in the event of an emergency. However, the interim report this time does not mention it at all.

(2) Hegemony adrift (Part 1): North Korea exports arms to Ethiopia; Putting high priority on fight against Al Qaeda, U.S. winks at contradictions

MAINICHI (Top play and Page 2) (Abridged slightly)
March 25, 2008

By Keiichi Shirato, Addis Ababa

An arms factory named Hormat Engineering Factory sits at some 135 kilometers west of Ethiopia's capital of Addis Ababa. According to a female off-duty soldier attached to a checkpoint near the factory,

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approximately 200 Ethiopian and North Korean live-in engineers and employees work there. The factory was built during the Mengistu socialist administration (1974-1991) with assistance from North Korea. After the Mengistu administration collapsed, a decision was made to turn the factory into a household goods factory. Following the territorial conflict with Eritrea in 1998-2000 in which Eritrea won independence from Ethiopia, yet another decision was made to rebuild it as an arms factory. North Korea undertook the rebuilding project and provided military supplies.

Situated inland, Ethiopia has no seaport. In landing military supplies from North Korea, three ports in Somaliland, which has declared independent of Somalia, were used for a total of four times between January and July 2007, according to Somaliland authorities.

At one of the three ports of the Saylac district, unloading work was conducted in a curfew under strict surveillance by Ethiopian soldiers and agents.

A nearby resident said:

"There was something like a liquid storage tank. After the work, air smelled like eggs and some residents showed cold-like symptoms for two weeks."

Military supplies from North Korea were also unloaded at two districts in the suburb of Somaliland's largest city of Barbera and were transported to the factory in Ethiopia by rail.

Obtaining information via diplomatic channels that Ethiopia was importing arms from North Korea, the United States and Britain hurried to confirm it. Eritrean Ambassador to Japan Estifanos indicated that chemical weapons were also included in the shipments from North Korea.

Britain's Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) has concluded that the supplies from North Korea were most likely raw materials for conventional weapons using phosphorus that can easily be mistaken for chemical weapons. They think the factory in Ethiopia is a facility to produce yellow phosphorus smoke bombs, rocket bombs, and fire arms.

The Ethiopian government released a statement on April 13, 2007, admitting that North Korean cargo ships had transported to Ethiopia machine components and raw materials for small arms ammunition for the arms factory in the country.

Despite that, the United States did not slap sanctions on Ethiopia.

To the United States, Ethiopia is an important point in East Africa in the war on terror. The United States is supporting Ethiopia in a bid to prevent anarchic Somalia from becoming a base of the Al Qaeda, the international terrorist group. Silent approval for North Korea's arms exports reflects the United States' foreign and security policies that give top priority to the war on terrorism.

On November 8, 2007, seven months after Ethiopia admitted to importing military supplies from North Korea, Eritrean Ambassador to Japan Estifanos visited the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA). Ambassador Estifanos told a senior MOFA official:

"We are deeply concerned that North Korea has been exporting

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strategically vital weapons to Ethiopia, Sudan and Yemen. The Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden are important trade routes for the international community, including Japan. The safety of those routes is being threatened."

The ambassador also proposed that Japan jointly address the North Korean arms export issue.

Eritrea, which is hostile toward Ethiopia, supports the Islamic Courts Union, Islamic fundamentalists in Somalia. Hitting on America's double standard of winking at arms exports by a state sponsor of terrorism (namely North Korea) for the sake of the war on terrorism against Islamic fundamentalists, Ambassador Estifanos proposed Japan, which has the abduction issue, to join forces against North Korea and Ethiopia.

On December 18, 2007, Eritrea voted for a UN General Assembly resolution (jointly presented by Japan, the United States and European nations) demanding immediate return of abductees from North Korea. Many African countries, such as Ethiopia, abstained from the vote or opposed the resolution for fear of drawing fire over their own human rights situations.

Ethiopia's admission of military supply imports from North Korea and America's silent approval for them created a sensation among people connected with foreign affairs. George Mason University Associate Professor Terrence Lyons, an expert on East African affairs, said: "Given the bad state of U.S.-DPRK relations, it was a surprise." An African diplomatic source also noted: "In recent years, I have never heard of a country that had officially admitted to military trade with North Korea."

Meanwhile, the United States is stepping up its anti-Eritrean stance. In a press conference on August 17, 2007, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Fraser warned: "If Eritrea

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continues to behave as in the past, we will have to consider (labeling the country a state sponsoring terrorism)." She also touched on the possibility of closing down the Eritrean Consulate General in the United States by citing the country's support for Islamic fundamentalists in Somalia.

National Security Council Senior Director for African Affairs Bobby Pittman also expressed concerns over Eritrea to a senior MOFA official when he visited Washington last year.

Associate Professor Lyons noted: "The United States will probably take certain steps toward countries trying to strengthen security relations with Eritrea."

As a U.S. ally, Japan cannot positively respond to Eritrea's proposal. Ambassador Estifanos complained, "There has been no reply from Japan." Arms exports to Ethiopia have been helping Kim Jong Il maintain his regime by becoming a source of foreign currency.

(3) China's multilateral diplomacy: "Fighting spirit" exposed

YOMIURI (Page 9) (Slightly abridged)
March 25, 2008

Generally, China is skillfully engaged in diplomatic horse-trading with industrialized and developing countries while carefully avoiding itself from sticking out from others. But when it comes to

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cases of facing up to Japan, China bares its rivalry with Japan without paying any attention as to how it looks.

The World Health Organization (WHO) had an election for its director-general in November 2006. The five candidates were narrowed down to three, who hailed from Japan, China, and Mexico. The Japanese government assumed that its candidate would win the seat. But Japan's candidate, Shigeru Omi, regional director of the Western Pacific of WHO, was rejected ahead of the runoff. Margaret Chan, who

came from Hong Kong and was backed by China, overwhelmingly won the election.

"The reason why the Japanese candidate failed to be elected was because some countries in Africa and the Middle East, which had given Japan a verbal promise to vote for its candidate, in the end voted for the China-backed candidate," a Japanese diplomat said, biting his lips. The diplomat went on to say: "Japan will probably have to avoid scrambling with China for an international post in the future. If there is such a situation, Japan would have to conduct a litmus test of the loyalty to Japan of developing countries that are seeking assistance from both Japan and China. But even the test result that may seem to be in Japan's favor does not guarantee our victory."

It is still fresh in our minds that China was vehemently opposed to Japan's bid for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council (UNSC) from spring through summer of 2005. Japan's bid for a permanent UNSC seat would have been an undesirable event for China, which began enjoying the "privileges" of a permanent UNSC member.

At the time Japan drew African countries to its side. By obtaining cooperation from the African Union (AU), Japan aimed at unifying the various plans for expanding the UNSC. Meanwhile, China approached some leading African countries behind the scenes and stirred their pride so that in the end, they would reject Japan's idea of unifying the various proposals. At an important AU summit held in summer of 2005, Chinese diplomats were seen walking up and down the hallways.

The AU is a powerful voting region consisting of 53 countries, but the AU has turned away from Japan. As a result, Japan, Germany, India, and Brazil (G-4) gave up on the idea of putting their resolution to a vote (in the UN). Since then, reform of the UNSC has lost momentum. Even now, there is no prospect for UNSC reform in sight. China has insisted even now that developing countries should be chosen on a priority basis as new members of the UNSC if it is expanded.

Japan's influence over African countries is attributable to its financial aid, including official development assistance (ODA). In contrast, China, by dispatching its troops to UN peacekeeping operations (PKOs), has established friendly ties with African countries one after the other.

China sent 113 personnel in 2003 to serve in UN peacekeeping and peace building units, but the figure sharply increased to 1,038 in 2005 and to 1,963 in January of this year. The 1,963 personnel come to nearly 50 times as many as the 38 personnel Japan has sent for PKO. Most personnel sent by China are mobilized in African countries, such as Sudan and Liberia. A UN diplomatic source noted in this regard: "(China) presumably would have learned the advantage of promoting multilateral diplomacy in its favor by demonstrating its human contributions to the international community through the

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dispatching of its personnel."

The United States is an anchor for Japan, but in its multilateral diplomacy the U.S. has at times struck a direct deal with China, going over Japan's head. One good example of this was the election of Ban Ki Moon as UN secretary-general in the fall of 2006.

Then U.S. Ambassador to the UN John Bolton, working in close cooperation with Chinese Ambassador to the UN Wang Guangya, went ahead with a plan to choose Ban as secretary-general. Looking back on the past, Bolton noted: "Everybody knew that once the U.S. and China reached agreement on a candidate, that candidate would win election." With the prevailing perception at the time being that a new secretary-general should be chosen from Asia, the United Kingdom, France, and Russia refrained from taking part in the selection of candidates. Behind the U.S. and China, Japan failed to make its presence strongly felt.

China is gaining power in international institutions related to economic affairs, as well. In November 2007, a Chinese candidate was chosen as a senior member of the World Trade Organization (WTO). In

this past February, there was an announcement that Chinese economist Lin Yufu was appointed to the post of vice president and chief economist at the World Bank.

A UN diplomatic source made this comment: "China has strategically unfolded multilateral diplomacy leading directly to its national interests. Japan still relies on the alliance with the U.S. Given this, it is impossible for Japan to surpass China."

China emphasizes its deployment of troops for international contributions

The strong sunlight was reflected in the sand. The temperature was 40 degrees centigrade. Chinese engineering troops sent by the People's Liberation Army were building a barrack for the UN-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) in a desert-like zone in the outskirts of Sudan's Southern Darfur's capital of Nyala.

The dispatched Chinese troops are a symbol of China's international contributions to demonstrate its efforts to resolve disputes ahead of the Beijing Olympic Games in August. The troops arrived in Darfur in November 2007. The number of Chinese troops is 140 at present, but Beijing plans to send more troops up to 315.

In this past February, U.S. producer Steven Spielberg declared that he refused to accept the post of advisor on culture and art for the Beijing Olympics, citing China's response to the Darfur issue. Actress and Ambassador to UNICEF Mia Farrow and U.S. Congressional members have appealed to the international audience to boycott the Beijing Olympics, calling them "Bloodshed Olympics."

An anti-government armed group in Darfur has warned that it will attack Chinese peacekeepers and oil industry workers and called on them to withdraw from the country.

(4) Interview with Australian Prime Minister Rudd by Yoichi Funabashi: Why is he bypassing Japan on his first overseas trip since taking office?

ASAHI (Page 3) (Full)
March 26, 2008

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Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd will this week set out on a two-week tour of the United States, Europe, and China.

The 21st century will be a "tripolar" age centered on the United States, Europe, and China... In anticipation of this, Rudd appears to want to herald the new age through his first full-scale overseas trip since taking office. Although Japan had been central to Australia's Asia policy until recently, China now appears to be taking its place.

Japanese policymakers and officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) are alarmed by Rudd's trip that bypasses Japan.

Rudd was somewhat perplexed, however, that Japan was reacting in that way, saying, "I know neither hiragana nor katakana, but I do know Chinese characters," he said and played up his ties with Japan through history, art, and culture.

But he has been linked more deeply by "fate" to China. Before entering politics, he was a diplomat well known for his proficiency in Chinese. China has taken Japan's place as Australia's largest trade partner.

Rudd's view of China stems from his stern realism. It is close to the concept of a China being a responsible stakeholder as advocated by former U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick (currently president of the World Bank). The concept is that as long as China accepts the status quo of international political order and the rule of the law, the U.S. will pursue an engagement policy toward China.

Rudd thinks the U.S.-Australia alliance and the cooperative system among Japan, the U.S., and Australia is key to the international

political order. Rudd was opposed to the Iraq war as showing America's disregard for the United Nations, not to mention its unilateralism. But it is acknowledged by everybody, including himself, that he is one of the most pro-American members of the Australian Labor Party. His policy toward the U.S. is almost the same as that of his predecessor Howard, except that "Howard was never critical of the U.S.," one Australian diplomat noted. Rudd promised in his election campaign to withdraw one-third of the Australian troops now deployed in Iraq but keep the troops in Afghanistan.

When asked about what to do about the cooperative arrangement among Japan, the U.S., and Australia, Rudd stated: "I will take over my predecessor's policy." However, in response to a question asking about former Prime Minister Abe's concept of establishing a four-way cooperative system among Japan, the U.S., Australia, and India, Rudd assumed a cautious stance, saying: "India is not keen about the idea. That holds true of the U.S., too. Even in Japan, there is disagreement about the concept." Apparently what he wanted to say would be that given the current situation, he could not support that concept.

The whaling issue is now affecting Japan-Australia relations. Some in Japan take the view that because of that, Rudd is bypassing Japan. In reaction to "Japan-bashing" in Australia, a dislike for that country has erupted in Japan.

When I asked Rudd about the possibility of pursuing the whaling issue with the International Court of Justice, he told me that

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resolving the issue diplomatically would be more desirable. He noted with confidence: "Because bilateral ties are solid, I'm not too worried about our having a disagreement." But I think both Japan and Australia should be cautious. Once both sides become overwhelmed by their emotions, the result could upset their diplomatic footing.

What I have keenly realized every time I had a conversation with Rudd is his ample experience and the broad personal networks he formed when he was a shadow foreign minister for the four years his party was in the opposition camp.

A high-level U.S. government official who knows Japan and Australia well at one point told me: "The two countries are democracies and our allies, but Japan and Australia are different. In the case of Australia, if the (U.S.) president visits it, he can have a substantive discussion with the head of the opposition party. But in Japan, doing so is impossible."

The U.S. official was thinking of Rudd when he referred to the head of Australia's opposition party. Immediately after Rudd won the election, President Bush contacted him to say: "I would welcome an early visit by you to the U.S." Rudd also has cultivated a good relationship with Chinese President Hu Jintao, so that a frank conversation would be held between the two.

The reason for Rudd bypassing Japan on his first overseas trip as prime minister in a way may lie with Japan itself. Japan is rapidly losing its national strength, including in the areas of economic power, foreign aid, and creativity. Japanese politics is no exception. Indeed, Japan remains unable to even choose who will lead the Bank of Japan. More importantly, Japan is void of a multifaceted diplomacy, as embodied by Rudd when he was shadow foreign minister.

Rudd aware of difficulties in bridging gaps between Japan and Australia over whaling but he can't back down because of necessity of playing up different stance from his predecessor

Akihito Sugii, Canberra, Seiichiro Utano

In the interview, Rudd, asked about the whaling issue over which a showdown between Japan and Australia has continued, said: "I believe the Japanese and Australian governments will be able to find a diplomatic solution because both are sincere." But the two countries are much far apart with Australia calling for a full suspension of whaling. The Rudd administration does not necessarily have any

specific chart to bring the issue to a resolution. Rudd, as well, admitted: "I realize that it is difficult to do so."

The International Whaling Commission (IWC) is supposed to offer an opportunity for talks, but it has ceased to function because it has been divided into two groups: pro-whaling countries, including Japan, and anti-whaling countries, including Australia. When commercial whaling will be resumed remains an open question even now.

In order to bring the IWC back on a normal track, Japan, in response to IWC Chairman Hogarth's request, decided to suspend hunting humpback whales over the next one or two years. Japan did so, taking it into consideration that humpback whales are very popular as the object of whale watching in Australia and other countries. In this regard, a senior Fisheries Agency (FA) official grumbled: "This was a significant concession for Japan. But Australia apparently thinks

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that (suspension) was only natural."

The Rudd administration has made clear its anti-whaling stance principally because it needs to demonstrate the difference in policies from the previous Howard administration, which was criticized as being weak-kneed for its prioritizing economic and security ties with Japan and not assuming a tough stance regarding the whaling issue. Rudd noted, "I know a radical view exists in Japan," but he can't give an impression that he caves in to Japan. Rudd in this sense appears in a fix.

The senior FA official noted: "Given Australia's assertion that 'it is impermissible to hunt even a single whale,' there is no room for Japan to make concessions with that country." Some in the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries suggest establishing a new international institution to replace the IWC.

Meanwhile, the whale meat market has been shrinking for the past two decades, so the product is not frequently put on the public's daily table. "Even if Japan tries to aggressively suppress the anti-whaling nations, it will not be possible to find a point of agreement," the senior official said.

SCHIEFFER